Buckwheat is a short season annual with a delicate, fibrous root system. Since it establishes quickly, it is useful for weed suppression. It also mellows the soil while improving aggregate stability. Classic uses include: ground cover after early vegetables, cover before planting strawberry beds, and bringing idle land into production. Buckwheat does well in low-fertility soils. It is a scavenger of phosphorus and calcium and mineralizes rock phosphate, making these nutrients available for later crops. Residue from the succulent buckwheat plants decomposes quickly. Buckwheat uses the shortest window of opportunity of any cover crop.

Land preparation
A well-prepared seedbed is necessary for a quick start for the crop. Avoid wet spots; buckwheat will not recover from flooding. Use minimal fertilizer. On established vegetable ground, residual nutrients are sufficient.

Seeding rate
Drill 50 lb/ac, ½ - 1 inch depth or
Broadcast 70 lb/ac ($15-$25/ac).

Seeding date
June -July. Can be planted as early as May 20 or as late as August 30 but will give less growth.

Seed sources
Birkett Mills, Lakeshore Organic Grain, Agriculver, Ernst Conservation Seed.

Maintenance
No pesticides needed; a good crop for organic rotations. Heavy rain reduces emergence; reseed if necessary. A well-established buckwheat canopy completely covers the ground. Plants often wilt during hot days but quickly recover.

Control
Mow 35-40 days after seeding or incorporate 35-45 days after seeding to avoid volunteers. The right time is when the field has just turned white with flowers.

Tips
Do not plant into hard soil. Buckwheat will not break up hardpan.
Flooding stops growth permanently.
Weeds will grow in any gaps over 10 inches.
Attracts beneficial insects such as parasitic wasps, ladybugs, and hoverflies. Also attracts harmful insects, such as tarnished plant bugs and aphids. However, aphids can serve as a food source for the beneficials.
References:
1http://www.nysaes.cornell.edu/hort/faculty/bjorkman/buck/guide/index.html
2Björkman, Shail, unpublished research.
3Björkman, Shail, unpublished research.

Disclaimer
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